

Church History
Lesson 9 - Church Life In the Third Century

1. Introduction - A Time of Growth, Structure, and Persecution

- 1.1. The third century was a time of real transition for the early church.
- 1.2. The church has spread geographically, grown quite large, and had begun attracting great thinkers and writers to her numbers.
 - 1.2.1. Every day there were more Christians among the aristocracy, and the ancient rumors about Christian immorality had little credence among the masses. Persecution was a past memory, both painful and glorious. (Gonzales, location 1957)
 - 1.2.2. Nevertheless, the early third century brought a period of peace that began to weaken these sectarian sentiments, as the church grew in numbers and began to attract favorable attention in the highest government circles (see chapter 9). (Ferguson, location 2875)
- 1.3. The final years of the second century and the early years of the third century were also marked by a period of relative peace for most believers. The early persecutions began to recede further from memory, and many believers had never suffered for their faith.
 - 1.3.1. In the last years of the second century, the church had enjoyed relative peace. (Gonzales, location 1901)
 - 1.3.2. In short, during almost half a century, persecution was rare, while the number of converts to Christianity was large. For this entire generation of Christians, the martyrs were worthy of great admiration, but they had lived in times past, and those evil times were not likely to be repeated. (Gonzales, location 1955)
- 1.4. In this period of peace the church became more structured in belief and practice. There was a growing centralization of power in the hands of a single leader - the bishop - and a growth in liturgy and art.
- 1.5. Eventually, however, the fires of persecution returned. Inevitably, some stood firm during the persecution, but some failed. This led to the question of how to handle those who compromised to one level or another. Could they be received back into the fold of the church - or were they banished forever? How did the church balance a message of grace and forgiveness with a call to holiness and non-compromise? And who made the decisions on if, when, and how those who failed under fire would be allowed to return?

2. The Growth and Development of Christian Practice in the Third Century

- 2.1. The simplicity of the early church - and her growth in size, practice, and complexity
 - 2.1.1. As we have noted, the early church, which had begun as a small band of Jewish disciples in Palestine, grew into a worldwide movement comprised mainly of Gentiles, over the first two centuries of the church.
 - 2.1.2. Furthermore, the church largely began as a movement of the underprivileged in Roman society - women, slaves, the uneducated -

but this situation was greatly changing by the end of the second century.

2.1.2.1. Wise scholars among Christians were the exception rather than the rule. It is significant that in his apology Against Celsus Origen does not contradict Celsus on this score. From the perspective of cultured pagans such as Tacitus, Cornelius Fronto, and Marcus Aurelius, Christians were a despicable rabble. (Gonzales, location 2065)

2.1.2.2. They were not entirely wrong, for there are indications that the vast majority of Christians during the first three centuries belonged to the lower echelons of society. (Gonzales, location 2067)

2.2. The growth in complexity of joining the church

2.2.1. In the early days of the church, those who heard the message were baptized and received into the local church.

2.2.1.1. Acts 2:41 - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

2.2.2. This situation was greatly changing by the end of the 2nd century. The initiation process for joining the church was becoming increasingly complex and lengthy.

2.2.2.1. Tertullian's treatise On Baptism and the Apostolic Tradition attributed to Hippolytus provide sufficiently similar accounts of Christian initiation to show the general pattern of how one became a part of the Christian community in the early third century. By that time the simple procedures recorded in the New Testament and early second-century sources had been elaborated considerably. (Ferguson, location 2915).

2.2.3. By this time, those interested in Christianity would be instructed for a lengthy period of time - perhaps up to three years - and undergo rigorous moral examination prior to being baptized in water, which was often done in an elaborate ritual on Easter Sunday.

2.2.3.1. But, as the Church became increasingly Gentile, it was necessary to require a period of preparation, trial, and instruction prior to baptism. This was the "catechumenate," which, by the beginning of the third century, lasted three years. (Gonzales, location 2159).

2.2.3.2. A lengthy period of instruction and a rigorous moral examination preceded admission to the final stage of preparation for baptism. The Apostolic Tradition required that candidates receive instruction for three years, but conceded that conduct—not length of time—was the decisive factor. (Ferguson, location 2919).

2.2.4. During this time, initiates, or catechumens as they were known, attended church meetings, but were dismissed prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.

- 2.2.4.1.** At least since the second century, there were two main parts in a communion service. First there were commented readings of Scripture, with prayers and hymn singing... Since at that time it was almost impossible for an individual Christian to possess a copy of Scripture, this first part of the service was almost the only way in which believers came to know the Bible, and therefore it was rather extensive—sometimes lasting for hours... Then came the second part of the service, communion proper, which opened with the kiss of peace. After the kiss, the bread and wine were brought forth and presented to the one presiding, who then offered a prayer over the elements. In this prayer, often lengthy, the saving acts of God were usually recounted, and the power of the Holy Spirit was invoked over the bread and the wine. Then the bread was broken and shared, the common cup was passed, and the meeting ended with a benediction. (Gonzales, location 2112-2115)
- 2.2.4.2.** Another common characteristic of these early communion services was that only those who had been baptized could attend. (Gonzales, location 2120).
- 2.2.5.** Instruction included doctrine, but also a heavy emphasis on moral conduct.
- 2.2.5.1.** Regarding conduct, slaves were taught to please their master, married persons to be content with their spouse, and unmarried persons to avoid fornication. Prostitutes, sodomites, and magicians were not even considered for membership. Brothel keepers, actors in the pagan theater, charioteers, gladiators, officials who put on the public games, pagan priests, military officers, and magistrates had to cease from these professions or were rejected for baptism. (Ferguson, location 2921).
- 2.2.6.** The conclusion of the process was a period of intense instruction in the faith, of fasting, repentance, and confession of sin. This was concluded with an elaborate ceremony of water baptism and then the newly received member would receive communion for the first time.
- 2.2.6.1.** The intensive preparation for baptism began on the Thursday before Easter Sunday (the preferred time for baptism). The time was spent in fasting, prayer, confession of sin, attendance at Scripture reading and instruction, and receiving exorcism of demons. Early on Sunday morning the administrator prayed to God to bring the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit on the water. The candidates removed their clothing—the children, then men, and finally women were baptized separately. The candidates made a verbal renunciation of “the Devil, his pomp, and his angels”—a

declaration of repentance—and were anointed with the oil of exorcism. (Ferguson, location 2929).

- 2.2.6.2.** Usually baptism was administered once a year, on Easter Sunday. Early in the third century it was customary for those about to be baptized to fast on Friday and Saturday, and to be baptized very early Sunday morning, which was the time of the Resurrection of Jesus. The candidates were completely naked, the men separated from the women. On emerging from the waters, the neophytes were given white robes, as a sign of their new life in Christ (see Col. 3:9–12 and Rev. 3:4). They were also given water to drink, as a sign that they were thoroughly cleansed, both outside and inside. Then they were anointed, thus making them part of the royal priesthood; and were given milk and honey, as a sign of the Promised Land into which they were now entering. (Gonzales, location 2162).
- 2.2.6.3.** After all the candidates were baptized, the entire congregation went in procession to the meeting place, where the neophytes partook of communion for the first time. (Gonzales, location 2168).
- 2.2.6.4.** While the one being baptized stood in the water, the bishop or presbyter conducting the baptism laid a hand on the head of the person and asked in turn, “Do you believe in God the Father almighty?” “Do you believe in Christ Jesus the Son of God . . . ?” and “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?” To each question the one being baptized responded, “I believe,” and after each confession the administrator guided his head under the water (or, alternatively, if the hand on the head was not functional, the water may have been scooped over the head, as often is the practice in later Orthodox baptisms). (Ferguson, location 2933).
- 2.2.6.5.** Quite notable in the sources is the association of a confession of faith with baptism. The triple immersion is first attested by Tertullian, but appears to have been the general custom and remains the practice in the Eastern Orthodox churches. (Ferguson, location 2938).
- 2.2.6.6.** After the third immersion, the administrator anointed each person with the oil of thanksgiving. The newly baptized persons dried off, put on clothes, and entered the assembly. The bishop laid his hand on the head of each and prayed (Tertullian associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with this post-baptismal imposition of hands) and then (according to the Apostolic Tradition) gave another anointing. The persons then joined the congregation in prayer and the kiss of peace. There followed the baptismal eucharist, which according to

the Apostolic Tradition included also a cup of water, symbolizing the washing that had occurred, and a cup of milk and honey, symbolizing the food of infants and entrance into the Promised Land. (Ferguson, location 2940).

2.2.7. There was also growing emphasis on the rituals associated with baptism (the proper external circumstances) rather than the simple act itself.

2.2.7.1. Other than in cases of the lack of sufficient water for immersion, an alternative action was allowed for persons on their sickbed and facing death. (Ferguson, location 2948).

2.2.7.2. Not all agreed, however, that sickbed baptism made one a legitimate Christian. When Novatian recovered and his bishop appointed him a presbyter, the other clergy and many laymen objected that someone who had received pouring while in bed due to sickness could not become a member of the clergy. (Ferguson, location 2951).

2.2.8. The question of infant baptism

2.2.8.1. There is disagreement as to exactly when infant baptism arose as a practice within the church. All are agreed that it was a common practice by the fifth century, but there is great disagreement on exactly when the practice began and how widespread it was during the third century.

2.2.8.1.1. To this day, scholars are not in agreement as to whether the early church baptized infants. By the early third century, there are indications that sometimes the children of Christian parents were baptized as infants. But all earlier documents, and many later ones, provide such scant information that it is impossible to decide one way or the other. (Gonzales, location 2172).

2.2.8.1.2. The Apostolic Tradition is one of the early references to the baptism of little children. Tertullian is the earliest certain reference to the practice, and he advised against it, but a half century later in his church in Carthage, Cyprian gave strong advocacy to infant baptism, even of the newborn. (Ferguson, location 2954).

2.2.8.1.3. The Apostolic Tradition's description of the ceremony of baptism shows that it was designed for those who had attained sufficient years to take an active part. (Ferguson, location 2956).

2.2.8.1.4. Justin Martyr reflected the normal situation in early times when he said, "As many as are persuaded and believe that the things taught

and said by us are true and promise to be able to live accordingly . . . are led by us to where there is water” (1Apology 61). Still, infant baptism became routine in the fifth and sixth centuries. (Ferguson, location 2962).

2.2.8.1.5. Tertullian alluded to cases of “necessity” as the occasion for bringing small children for baptism. It seems that the threat of imminent death was the probable situation in which infant and child baptism arose. Influential was John 3:5, the most cited baptismal text in the early church, understood as requiring baptism in order to enter heaven. (Ferguson, location 2965).

2.2.8.2. A growing concern about the necessity of water baptism and post-baptismal sin

2.2.8.2.1. There is evidence that concerns regarding the absolute necessity of water baptism for salvation and the problem of forgiveness for post-baptismal sin began to lead to a practice of delaying baptism until as near the point of death as possible. This was a practice that continued, as seems to have even been adopted by Constantine.

2.2.8.2.1.1. Burial inscriptions that give information on the time of baptism, and on the age at death of the deceased, show a close correlation in time between the baptism and the death, whatever the age of the person. (Ferguson, location 2968).

2.2.8.2.2. This also led to the nearly universal acceptance of infant baptism over the next 150 years, as concerns grew regarding the state of infants who died without being water baptized.

2.3. A growth in the liturgy of the church

2.3.1. The pattern of worship in the pages of the New Testament seems to be fairly simple, and included the regular reading and teaching of Scripture, singing, praying, fellowship, the use of spiritual gifts, and the celebration of the Eucharist.

2.3.1.1. Acts 2:42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

2.3.1.2. 1 Timothy 4:12 - Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

- 2.3.1.3. Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
- 2.3.1.4. 1 Corinthians 14:26 - What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.
- 2.3.2. It appears that the normal time for meeting became Sunday (the Lord's Day) very early on.
 - 2.3.2.1. Acts 20:7 - On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.
 - 2.3.2.2. 1 Corinthians 16:2 - On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.
 - 2.3.2.3. Revelation 1:10 - On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...
 - 2.3.2.4. From the earliest days, the church had established the custom of meeting for communion and worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, to which Christians gave the name "Lord's day," in honor of Jesus' resurrection. This name was consistently distinguished from the Sabbath day. (Ferguson, location 2983).
 - 2.3.2.5. We are told in the book of Acts that from the very beginning the early church had the custom of gathering on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread. The reason for gathering on the first day of the week was that this was the day of the resurrection of the Lord. Therefore, the main purpose of this service of worship was not to call the faithful to repentance, or to make them aware of the magnitude of their sins, but rather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the promises of which that resurrection was the seal. This is why Acts describes those gatherings as happy occasions: "they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God for having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46–47). Those early communion services did not focus their attention on the events of Good Friday, but rather on those of Easter. (Gonzales, location 2095).
 - 2.3.2.6. The Roman governor Pliny noted the custom of Christians meeting to worship Jesus Christ on a fixed day before sunrise, a practice necessary because Sunday was not a holiday before the time of Constantine. They met again in the evening for a meal, perhaps the agape (love feast) described by Tertullian as consisting of prayer, holy conversation, and

- chanting praise, along with the common meal of fellowship at which the needy were also fed. (Ferguson, location 2988)
- 2.3.2.7.** Justin Martyr provides our earliest explicit account of activities in the Sunday assembly: readings from the memoirs of the apostles or writings of the prophets, a sermon based on the readings, prayer, the eucharist of bread and wine mixed with water, and a voluntary contribution for those in need. (Ferguson, location 2993).
- 2.3.3.** During this time, the meeting became separated into two distinct parts - a period of teaching which was open to all, and a period for communion/Eucharist which was open only to those who had been baptized.
- 2.3.3.1.** Perhaps by the end of the third century there was a separation of two parts of the service. The first part centered on instruction in the Word, to which all were welcome. The second part centered on the Lord's supper, to which only baptized believers not under discipline were admitted. (Ferguson, location 2995).
- 2.3.3.2.** At least since the second century, there were two main parts in a communion service. First there were commented readings of Scripture, with prayers and hymn singing. (Gonzales, location 2112).
- 2.3.3.3.** Since at that time it was almost impossible for an individual Christian to possess a copy of Scripture, this first part of the service was almost the only way in which believers came to know the Bible, and therefore it was rather extensive—sometimes lasting for hours. (Gonzales, location 2113).
- 2.3.3.4.** Then came the second part of the service, communion proper, which opened with the kiss of peace. After the kiss, the bread and wine were brought forth and presented to the one presiding, who then offered a prayer over the elements. In this prayer, often lengthy, the saving acts of God were usually recounted, and the power of the Holy Spirit was invoked over the bread and the wine. Then the bread was broken and shared, the common cup was passed, and the meeting ended with a benediction. (Gonzales, location 2115).
- 2.3.3.5.** Another common characteristic of these early communion services was that only those who had been baptized could attend. (Gonzales, location 2120).
- 2.3.4.** The importance of the eucharist/communion in the worship of the early church.
- 2.3.4.1.** As noted above, the eucharist was given its own special part of the meeting, which was reserved only for believers who had been water baptized.

- 2.3.4.2.** The most common name for communion at this time was “the Eucharist” - the thanksgiving.
 - 2.3.4.2.1.** The common name in the early church for the Lord’s supper or communion was “eucharist” (“thanksgiving”), calling attention to its principal aspect. It held a central place... (Ferguson, location 2997).
- 2.3.4.3.** In many ways, the Eucharist was the high point of worship and the most important part of worship in the early church. It was a time of real celebration and community.
 - 2.3.4.3.1.** From that time, and throughout most of its history, the Christian church has seen in communion its highest act of worship. Only at a relatively recent date has it become common practice in many Protestant churches to focus their worship on preaching rather than on communion. (Gonzales, location 2102).
 - 2.3.4.3.2.** The most remarkable characteristic of those early communion services was that they were celebrations. The tone was one of joy and gratitude, rather than sorrow and repentance. In the beginning, communion was part of an entire meal. (Gonzales, location 2107).
 - 2.3.4.3.3.** However, by the beginning of the second century the common meal was being set aside, perhaps for fear of persecution, or in order to quell the rumors about orgiastic “love feasts.” Although the celebration then became more symbolic, the original tone of joy remained. (Gonzales, location 2110).
- 2.3.4.4.** The “realist” language used in the early church for communion.
 - 2.3.4.4.1.** The early church spoke simply of the body and blood of Christ, without any speculations as to metaphysical changes in the elements, or feeling any need to describe the symbolic nature of such language.
 - 2.3.4.4.2.** This also became part of the Church’s polemic against and refutation of Gnostic heresies.
 - 2.3.4.4.3.** Realist language about the presence of Jesus Christ was common, often with an anti-heretical thrust, emphasizing that the material elements were the means of spiritual blessings. (Ferguson, location 3001).
- 2.3.5.** Over time, the practice of these parts of worship became more formalized, and more centralized under the direct guidance of the

bishop. Specific prayers, specific passages of Scripture, and specific words of institution at the celebration of the Eucharist became the norm.

2.3.5.1. It further enjoined praying the Lord's Prayer three times a day. Different sources reflect other practices for daily private prayer: at meals, three times a day, and at night (Clement of Alexandria) or five times a day and at night (Tertullian). (Ferguson, location 3018).

2.3.5.2. One version of the document specifies six other hours of the day and night for prayer. (Ferguson, location 3022).

2.3.5.3.

2.3.6. Furthermore, the church came to increasingly adopt cultic language (language related to temples, sacrifices, etc.) to describe herself, her ministers, and her worship.

2.3.6.1. In the first two centuries Christian apologists like Justin Martyr noted the difference from pagan religions in the absence of temples, altars, images, and material sacrifices. In the third century, as part of an increasing distinction between the clergy and the laity, the language of priesthood began to be more regularly applied to Christian ministers (perhaps more comparatively by Origen but in a straightforward way by Cyprian). (Ferguson, location 3009).

2.3.6.2. The Christian assimilation to the environment in cultic terminology increased throughout the third century and became standard in the fourth century. By then, ministers were priests, church buildings were temples, communion tables were altars, and sacred art was common. (Ferguson, location 3012).

2.3.7. The growth of the church calendar

2.3.7.1. Initially the church calendar primarily consisted of Sunday, when Christians would gather to remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. (See above on 2.3.2).

2.3.7.1.1. At the beginning, the Christian calendar was rather simple and was basically a weekly calendar. Every Sunday was a sort of Easter, and a day of joy; and every Friday was a day of penance, fasting, and sorrow. Rather early, for reasons that are not altogether clear, Wednesday also became a day of fasting. (Gonzales, location 2144).

2.3.7.2. Eventually certain days began to be the cause of specific celebration. Most notably this began with the celebration of Easter.

2.3.7.2.1. Interestingly there was quite a controversy over exactly when Easter should be celebrated! Some thought it should be celebrated in

relation to Passover, but others said it should always be celebrated on Sunday. This led to what was known as the quartodeciman controversy (from the Latin word for the “fourteenth” - which referred to the 14th of Nisan - the Jewish calendar date for Passover).

2.3.7.2.1.1. Once a year there was a very special Sunday, the day of resurrection, the greatest of Christian celebrations. Unfortunately, Christians were not in agreement as to when the great day was to be celebrated, for some thought it should be set in accordance with the Jewish Passover, while others believed that it should always be celebrated on a Sunday. By the second century there were bitter debates about the matter. To this day, although for other reasons, not all churches agree on the manner in which the date of Easter Sunday is to be determined. (Gonzales, location 2146).

2.3.7.3. Easter then began to be the time of baptism of new converts, and the renewal of baptismal vows for those who were already Christians. Furthermore, as we have seen, prior to being baptized, the new believer was to go through a period of repentance and confession. This eventually developed into the practice of Lent.

2.3.7.3.1. Part of what took place at Easter was the baptism of new converts, and the renewal of the vows of baptism by those who were already Christian. In preparation for these events, there was a time of fasting and penance. This is the origin of our present-day Lent. Pentecost, a feast of Jewish origin, was also celebrated by Christians from a very early date. (Gonzales, location 2150).

2.3.7.4. Eventually other days, including the birth and dedication of Jesus, began to be added. And finally, days associated with martyrs and saints were added to the calendar.

2.3.7.4.1. The earliest feast day in connection with the birth of Jesus was January 6, Epiphany, the day of his manifestation. This was originally the celebration of the birth itself. Later, particularly in some areas of the Latin West, December 25 began to take its place. This latter date was actually a pagan festival which, after the time of Constantine, was preempted by the celebration of Christmas. (Gonzales, location 2153).

2.4. The growth of church structure and the power of the bishop

2.4.1. As we saw in earlier lessons, the structure of church government in the New Testament was simple: deacons to handle practical ministry needs, and elders to oversee the spiritual life of the flock. There is no evidence in the New Testament of a distinction between a “bishop” or “pastor” and elders.

2.4.1.1. These local leaders were of two sorts. One group was called elders or presbyters (from the Greek for “elders”). These same men were also known as bishops (overseers) or pastors (shepherds). The other group of leaders was called deacons. (Shelley, location 1394)

2.4.1.2. The duties of these leaders varied from place to place, but generally speaking the presbyters taught new converts, led in public worship, and maintained discipline. The deacons assisted the presbyters in every way except perhaps presiding at the Lord’s Supper. (Shelley, location 1397).

2.4.2. Beginning with Ignatius of Antioch we begin to read of those arguing for the office of a single bishop, distinct from the other elders/ presbyters. However, it is clear that the acceptance of this new structure was slow to develop, and was adopted in some locations (such as Antioch) much earlier than others (such as Alexandria and Rome).

2.4.2.1. This general picture, however, soon changed. After the turn of the century Ignatius, the pastor of the church at Antioch, wrote a series of letters. In these he speaks habitually of a single bishop (or pastor) in each church, a body of presbyters, and a company of deacons. (Shelley, location 1400).

2.4.2.2. It took some years before Ignatius’ threefold ministry was adopted everywhere. We know, for example, that Alexandria had no single bishop until about A.D. 180. (Shelley, location 1406).

2.4.3. However, by the late second century the idea of a single bishop was almost universally accepted. In part, this had developed as part of the churches response to Gnosticism and Marcion.

- 2.4.3.1.** The Organization of the Church It is clear that early in the second century there were in the church three distinct positions of leadership: bishop, presbyter—or elder—and deacon. (Gonzales, location 2175).
- 2.4.3.2.** As the church became increasingly Gentile, the danger of heresies was greater, and this in turn led to a greater stress on episcopal authority. (Gonzales, location 2185).
- 2.4.3.3.** In the second century the bishop had presided at worship and the presbyters had largely been responsible for church discipline. By the mid-third century (Cyprian), however, the bishops secured control of discipline and with the growth of city churches presbyters were delegated liturgical functions in the separate assemblies. (Ferguson, location 2902).
- 2.4.3.4.** By the late second century, however, the unchallenged leader in church affairs was the bishop. His hands were gently strengthened by the conflict with the gnostics, who appealed to a succession of teachers traced back to the apostles. (Shelley, location 1410).
- 2.4.3.5.** Catholic Christians countered this argument by stressing the public teaching of the churches, the Rule of Faith, and the bishops in the churches established by the apostles. This argument was outlined first by Hegesippus, a historian who traveled from Palestine to Rome in the mid-second century. (Shelley, location 1414).
- 2.4.3.6.** Later in the century Irenaus in Gaul and Tertullian in North Africa followed in this antignostic path mapped out by Hegesippus. They pointed to the succession of bishops in the catholic churches stemming from the apostles and argued that this guaranteed the unbroken tradition of the apostles' doctrine within the catholic churches. Gnostics were wrong; Catholics were right. (Shelley, location 1419).

2.5. The question of women in ministry and leadership

- 2.5.1.** It is clear that by the end of the second and beginning of the third century the leadership of the church was entirely comprised of men. Women were not allowed to serve as bishops, presbyters or deacons.
 - 2.5.1.1.** The place of women in the leadership of the early church deserves special attention. It is clear that by the end of the second century the leadership of the church was entirely masculine. (Gonzales, location 2186).
 - 2.5.1.2.** Only in Montanism and some Gnostic sects did women engage in public preaching and presiding at liturgical functions. (Ferguson, location 3077).
- 2.5.2.** Gonzales incorrectly asserts that all of this was a change from the time of the New Testament.
 - 2.5.2.1.** Particularly in the New Testament, there are indications that women also had positions of leadership. Philip had four

daughters who “prophesied”—that is, who preached. Phoebe was a female deacon in Cenchreae, and Junias was counted among the apostles. (Gonzales, location 2188).

1. The problem is that the NT use of “prophecy” is NOT the same as teaching. In fact Paul forbids women from teaching (1 Timothy 2:11-15) but gives instruction on how they should pray and prophesy in public meetings (1 Corinthians 11:4-5).
2. Furthermore, the use of Romans 16:7 is highly problematic. First, it is uncertain if Junias is a feminine name, and furthermore the phrase is likely referring to Andronicus and Junias having a great reputation with the apostles - not that they were themselves apostles.
2. What actually seems to have taken place is that during the second century, in its efforts to combat heresy, the church centralized its authority, and a by-product of that process was that women were excluded from positions of leadership. But still in the early years of the second century, governor Pliny informed Trajan that he had ordered that two Christian “female ministers” be tortured. (Gonzales, location 2190).
 - 2.1. The problem here is that the word for “female ministers” is deacon (or deaconess - the feminine form of the word), and women were allowed to be deacons in the New Testament (see 1 Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:1).
3. This is important because the fact is we have no record of women serving in positions of authority (as Gonzales asserts) anytime within the first few centuries of the early church.
 - 3.1. Only in Montanism and some Gnostic sects did women engage in public preaching and presiding at liturgical functions. (Ferguson, location 3077).
 - 3.2. New Testament strictures against women doing public teaching in church, and against women filling the position of elders, seem to have been uniformly observed in the mainstream of the church. (Ferguson, location 3079).
2. However, it is true that women had originally served as deacons, and this role became restricted with time. This apparently happened both because of increasing restrictions and centralization of the church and the changing role of deacons (from ministers of practical mercy to those who assisted in liturgy and were preparing to become clergy.)

- 2.6.** The growing “cult of the martyrs”
- 2.6.1.** Over time, the respect and even veneration given to those who had died while walking in faith, and especially of martyrs, continued to develop and grow.
 - 2.6.2.** Especially in Rome, Christians who died - both martyrs and those who simply died of natural causes - were buried in what became known as the catacombs. Contrary to common thought today, the catacombs were not places of escape, nor was their location secret, nor were they only used by Christians. They were simply burial grounds outside the city walls. However, due to the Christian practice of burial rather than incineration they became increasingly filled with the bodies of Christians.
 - 2.6.2.1.** Although on occasion Christians did use the catacombs as hiding places, the reason why they gathered there was not that they feared the authorities, but rather that many heroes of the faith were buried there, and Christians believed that communion joined them, not only among themselves and with Jesus Christ, but also with their ancestors in the faith. (Gonzales, location 2126).
 - 2.6.2.2.** The catacombs were not hiding places in times of persecution (the authorities knew of their existence), nor were they normally places of assembly, although funerary meals in memory of the deceased were held there. The rooms (cubicula) and their entrances were sometimes decorated with small paintings, and the stone slabs covering the burial niches (loculi) in the galleries were sometimes chiseled with inscriptions or simple pictures. (Ferguson, location 3300).
 - 2.6.2.3.** There is no evidence of Christian use of separate burial grounds in the early period. About 200 the church in Rome acquired what became the nucleus of the catacomb of Callistus, but the shared use of the same tombs by pagans and Christians continued to be common into the fourth century. (Ferguson, location 3103).
 - 2.6.3.** Furthermore, going down into the catacombs to bury a loved one was a major trip, so the burial was often conducted as part of a worship meeting.
 - 2.6.4.** Additionally, current Greco-Roman cultural practices included great respect for the dead, particularly heroes. To show respect, meals were often taken to the tomb, especially on the anniversary of the persons birthday. Christians adapted these practices - the food became a worship meeting including eucharist, and the anniversary celebrated was not that of the birth but of the death - the day of birth into immortality.
 - 2.6.4.1.** In the background of the development of the Christian cult of martyrs are ideas associated with the cult of heroes in Greek

religion and with funerary practices of the Greco-Roman world. The heroes were those who were strong in this life and who remained strong to help after death. Their influence was confined to their relics and where they were buried. Respect for the dead included meals taken in memory of the deceased at the tomb by the family periodically after a person's death, and then annually on that person's birthday. Christian practice made some changes in these customs. The funerary meals were eucharistic in the church (Acts of John and Tertullian). (Ferguson, location 3162).

- 2.6.4.2.** The day of the death was treated by Christians as the "birthday" (the birthday to immortality), and so the anniversary of the death—instead of the birth—was commemorated. (Ferguson, location 3168).
- 2.6.4.3.** The names of the martyrs were carefully kept in the records of the churches and their "birthdays" into eternal life were remembered by annual celebrations at their tombs. The "saints" were coming! (Shelley, location 1506).
- 2.6.4.4.** Another early custom was to gather for communion at the tombs of the faithful. This was the function of the catacombs. (Gonzales, location 2123).
- 2.6.4.5.** This was particularly true in the case of martyrs. As early as the middle of the second century, it was customary to gather at their tombs on the anniversary of their deaths, and there to celebrate communion. (Gonzales, location 2129).
- 2.6.5.** Over time, the belief grew in the power of the bones and relics of these "saints" - especially the martyrs. Then we begin to read of calls to these saints and martyrs to pray for the living.
 - 2.6.5.1.** The latter half of the third century shows the cultic veneration of martyrs had penetrated everywhere. Inscriptions began to appear in Rome, "Peter and Paul, pray for us all. (Ferguson, location 3172).
 - 2.6.5.2.** The principal expression of cult, or worship, was prayer addressed to the martyr, so that prayer to the deceased became more prominent than prayer for the repose of souls. (Ferguson, location 3174).
 - 2.6.5.3.** The martyr was already in the presence of God and had won "freedom of speech" (parrhesia) so as to be able to serve as an intercessor. The invocation of the saints was based on this idea of intercession. (Ferguson, location 3176).
 - 2.6.5.4.** The practice of prayer to the martyr was preferably in the presence of the tomb, for there the power was most evident. (Ferguson, location 3179).
 - 2.6.5.5.** In Origen explicitly, but also in the fourth-century theologians, the veneration of martyrs stood in relation to Jesus Christ

and not in competition with him, for the martyrs were his servants. (Ferguson, location 3180).

2.6.6. This practice would continue to develop in the coming centuries until it became a full blown doctrine and practice of veneration of the saints, and their inclusion in special days and liturgies.